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Winnetka, Ill. -- Council

Winnetka, 1869-1944

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY

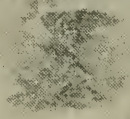
VILLAGE OF WINNETKA ILL.
CORPORATE SEAL
1869
1944
A LOOK BACKWARD - AHEAD

Certificate Number.

STATE OF ILLINOIS

OFFICE OF

THE SECRETARY OF STATE



To all to whom these Presents Shall Come Greeting:

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In Testimony Whereof, [illegible]

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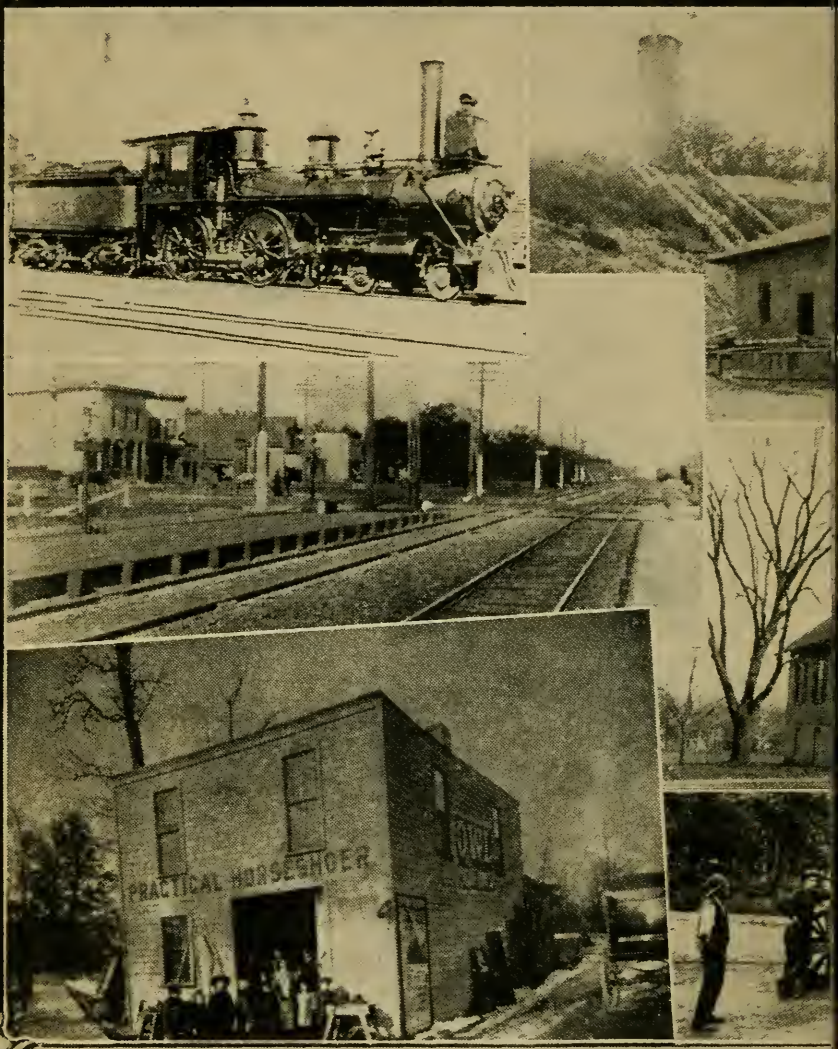
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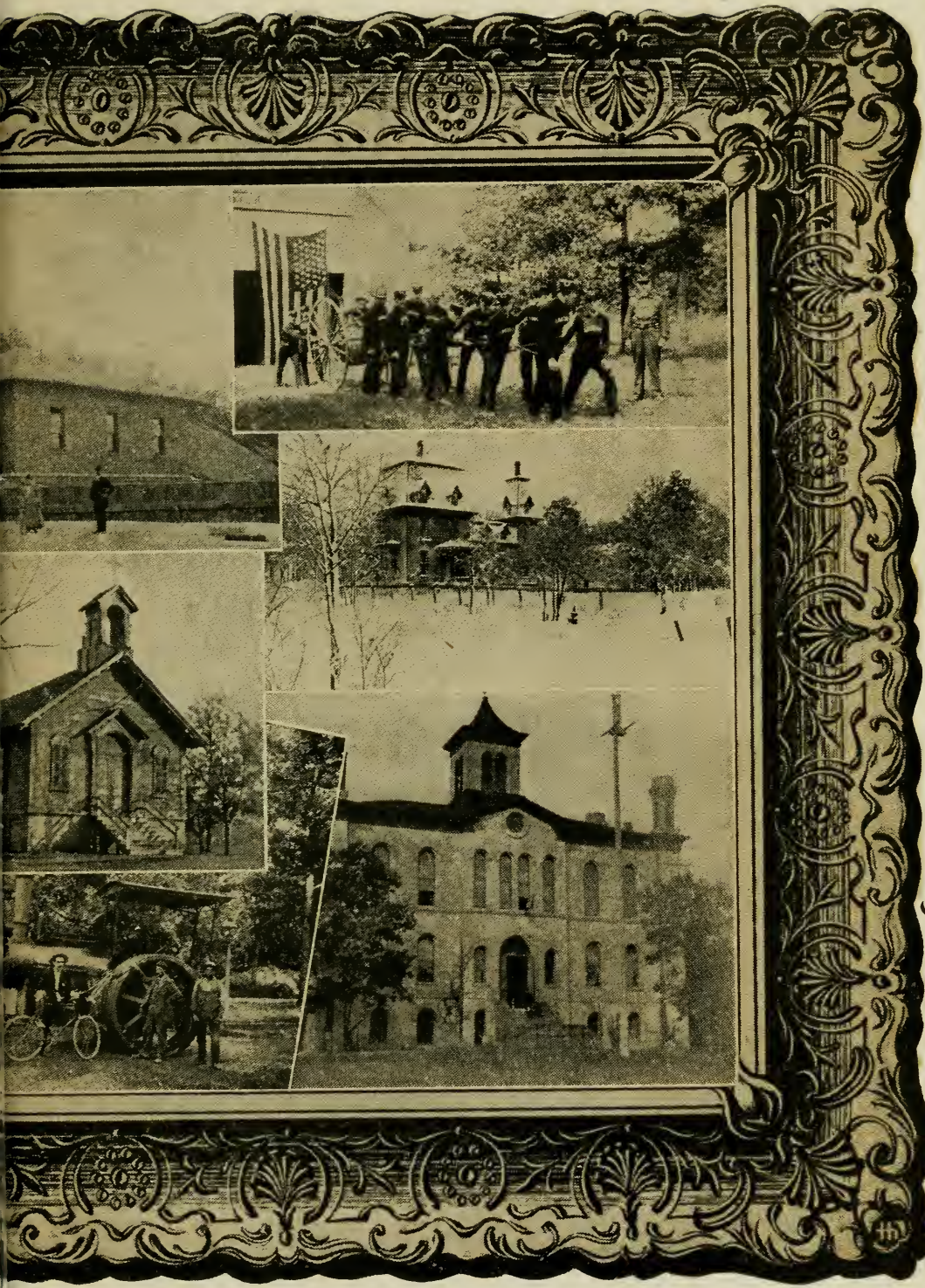

WINNETKA

1869-1944

A Look Backward-Ahead

A BOOKLET PUBLISHED BY THE VILLAGE COUNCIL OF WINNETKA COMMEMORATING THE 75th ANNIVERSARY OF THE GRANTING OF A SPECIAL CHARTER TO THE VILLAGE

MARCH 10, 1944

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FOREWORD

On March 10, 1869, the Village of Winnetka was incorporated through grant of a special charter by the State Legislature. In the intervening 75 years it has assumed a distinguished place among smaller American communities. It has made numerous and significant contributions to progress in civic, educational and sociological fields.

Certainly, it is the desire of all who live in Winnetka to keep it the kind of a community it is and has been. This may be increasingly difficult as population grows less stable; as we reach the end of our land resources and call develops for their more intensive use; as metropolitan forces impinge increasingly upon our now suburban atmosphere.

In this booklet, commemorative of our 75th anniversary as an incorporated community, the purpose is not so much to review the details of the past, interesting and colorful as they are, as to stress the community's distinguishing features and to interpret the reasons for their development. Only through understanding these features and their background can we appreciate our good fortune in inheriting them from those who preceded us and our responsibility for carrying them forward to those who succeed us.

A. E. Bryson
Village President

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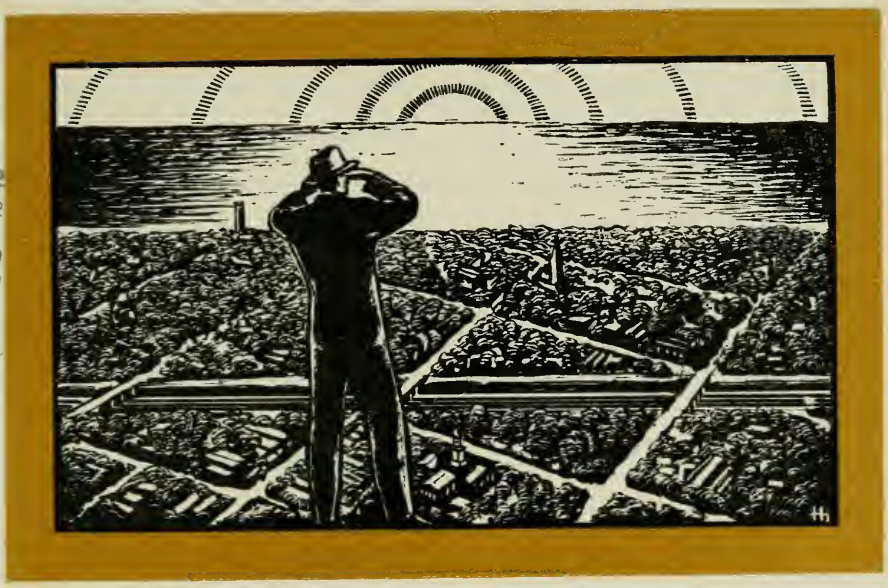

A LOOK AT WHAT WE HAVE

As mid-western communities go, Winnetka is fairly old, having been organized as a village under its special charter in 1869. It has chosen to retain its "village" designation because of certain advantages which its special charter provides over more recently enacted general legislation governing the affairs of most communities of its size. Aside from this, however, Winnetka cherishes and seeks to maintain its "village" atmosphere as a counterpoise to the bigness and metropolitan aspects of neighboring Chicago.

"Winnetka" means "Beautiful Land" in the Indian whence the word came. Winnetka is that—a tree studded community of well kept homes, located on the shore of Lake Michigan twenty miles north of Chicago. Population 13,000, it is one of a series of suburban communities which extend from the north limits of Chicago to Waukegan some thirty miles distant. Most of its adult male citizens, largely business and professional men, shuttle back and forth daily between Chicago, the source of their livelihood, and Winnetka, their place of residence.

The economic status of its people is above average, with little or no poverty, some very wealthy families, and the great majority in what, for want of better designation, would probably be termed the upper-middle class. Educationally, the community is also above average with a good part of its family heads, both husbands and wives, possessing college degrees. Religiously, it compares favorably with other similar communities, and in its philanthropic and charitable interests, both in the home town and in Chicago, it enjoys a well earned reputation for generosity.

Winnetka's government, like that of most small communities, consists of a Village Council, a Park Board, a School Board and a Library Board. Its

village government operates under the Council-Manager Plan, the community having been among the first to adopt that now widely recognized and broadly accepted forward step in municipal government. Likewise, the Village was among the first to acquire and operate its own water and electric utilities and its efficient and successful conduct of both has frequently been pointed to as an example of the advantages of municipal ownership, although it is rather an example of honest and efficient local government. Operation of its utilities is distinctive, moreover, in that rates are maintained at the level of those of neighboring privately owned utilities. This policy is adhered to in order to avoid any suggestion of unfair competition with private industry and also to earn a satisfactory return on the investment for the benefit of taxpayers, the owners of the property, rather than being operated mainly for the benefit of consumers who may, or may not, be taxpayers.

Winnetka's schools have for many years enjoyed national recognition because of the pioneering work and able support given over a long period to progressive education by Winnetka leadership. Interested students of the Winnetka schools became so numerous that an instruction course delineating the basic

philosophy and methods of the Winnetka system was instituted in 1932 and has since been continuously maintained in Winnetka; its graduates have carried the Winnetka program far afield. Winnetka's library, with almost two-thirds of the population registered as patrons, evidences the community's interest in educational, cultural and recreational reading, and provides an important rallying point for the many who share this salutary common interest.

With its lake and park facilities, Winnetka is fortunately situated for outdoor recreation. Its park area amounts to 14.9 acres per 1,000 population, which compares with a national average of about 3 acres for cities of 10,000 to 25,000 population. Winnetka's park system embraces 26 park areas, chief of which is the 142 acres "Playfield", now supplemented by an even larger adjacent Forest Preserve (owned by Cook County). This latter, an area of lagoons, marshes and wild life, not only provides exceptional recreational facilities but sets up a permanent buffer between Winnetka and industrial development to the west. The Playfield includes an 18-hole golf course, where villagers may play for a small annual fee; it also includes tennis courts, athletic fields and a lighted soft-ball diamond. The Park Board

operates three bathing beaches on Lake Michigan, conveniently located for easy access from all sections of the Village.

Winnetka's Community House, reputedly the first of its type in the country and the first to use the designation "Community House", has served as a model for hundreds of like institutions which have developed since its founding in 1911. Here centers the group life of the Village. In all, 70 different organizations make this their headquarters, including such diverse groups as the American Legion, the Rotary Club, the North Shore Art League, the Winnetka Drama Club, the Boy Scouts, the North Shore Choral Society, the North Shore Garden Club, etc. The rambling, much-used structure includes a large gymnasium, motion picture theater, bowling alleys, an art studio, two large assembly halls and some 30 smaller rooms designed for groups of every size and character. Recently its large basement has been attractively remodeled as a canteen, with a dance floor, "coke-bar", and tables with a seating capacity for over 250, thus meeting a real need in the recreational life of the young people of the community. Community House is administered by a full-time director and staff, under the supervision of a Board of Governors chosen in

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turn by the Community Council. The latter, composed of representatives of all clubs and organized groups in the Village, including the governing bodies, the churches and the schools, provides a responsive medium for discussion and disposition of community problems which do not fall naturally under the jurisdiction of the regular elective boards.

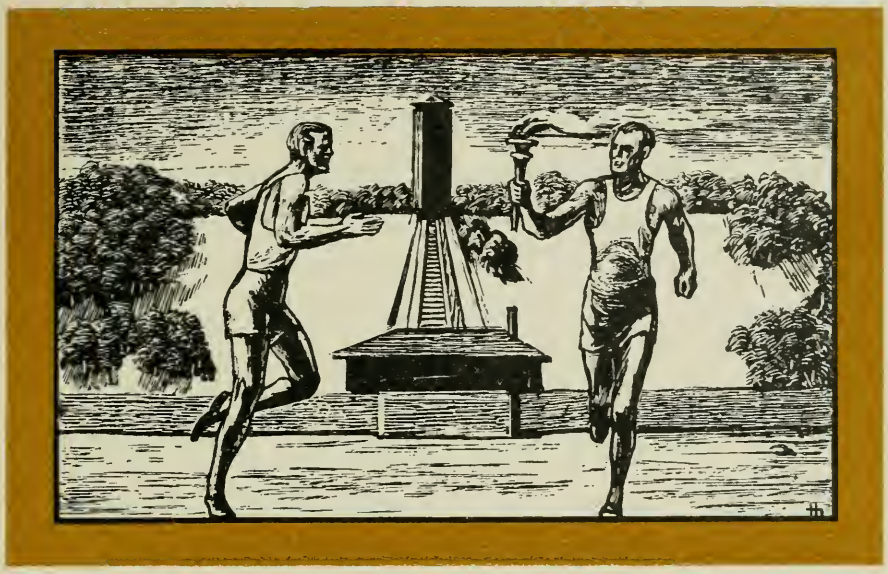
Winnetka's churches are fewer in number than in most communities of its size, which is a designed development rather than a reflection of religious indifference. In addition to the Episcopal, Catholic and Scientist churches, there are two small Lutheran churches and one large Congregational, the latter being in the nature of a union or community church with 28 denominations represented in its membership. Winnetka's churches are well housed, ably staffed and uniformly more prosperous and well attended than is frequently the case, partly due to avoidance of duplication of plant and overlapping of effort customarily found where each of numerous religious denominations struggles to maintain its own separate establishment.

The financial record of the Village and of its various boards attests the quality of their administration. The Village government operated throughout the depres-

sion years without the use of red ink; its assets, both fixed and current, now aggregate about $4¾ millions and, except for indebtedness incurred in the recently completed and long-cherished grade separation project traversing the length of the Village, it has no other direct bonded debt. It has maintained an unbroken record of punctual payments of all obligations, including special assessment bonds. The Village Hall (an imposing $250,000 structure) was built out of surplus earnings of the utilities and about $300,000 of the Village's share of the grade separation project came from the same source; since 1918, the electric plant has paid $1,822,115 in dividends to the General Fund of the Village. Winnetka's over-all tax rate is considerably lower than that of Chicago. The rate of its own taxing boards only—the Village, the school and park boards—is in line with that of neighboring communities though it includes the annual payment of grade separation bonds and interest, which the others do not have. The Village operates under strict budgetary control; employees are chosen and continue to serve wholly on a merit basis, and with the incentive of a liberal retirement plan. All purchases are made on a competitive basis, and where advantage results from joint buying or operation, the Vil-

lage Board joins with other local boards, and in some cases with neighboring villages, to effect economies or to render service that might otherwise be prohibitive in cost. All Village accounts are audited semi-annually by independent certified public accountants.

While citing a few of the institutions and achievements of Winnetka as evidence of its good citizenship, it may also be in order to recount a few things it does *not* have—and the absence of which is no less significant than its assets. Winnetka has no taverns, nor is the sale of liquor permitted. It has no commercial movies within its corporate limits; in fact, no commercial amusements of any kind. It has no serious crime and in February, 1943, it was one of only four American cities among the 388 in the 10,000 to 25,000 population class which rounded out a four year record of no fatal traffic accidents. It has no "right" and "wrong" side of the tracks. It has, as previously noted, no operating deficits. Most significantly, and of this more will be said later, it has no partisan politics in its local elections.



HOW WE ACQUIRED WHAT WE HAVE

What, chiefly, is responsible for the many civic assets which have so long distinguished this community and made possible its numerous significant contributions to municipal progress?

The answer to this question is probably not to be found in any single factor, though it reflects principally the obvious truth that good citizens make good communities. As to why Winnetka is fortunate in having so large a proportion of good citizens is not so easily answered, though important in any effort to

interpret the character and development of the community.

Winnetka in its formative years was, and is now, a village of homes. It has no industrial development, few apartments, rather restricted commercial activity, but lots of children and dogs. Families looking for a good place to raise children were quite naturally attracted to Winnetka. A village having as its primary objective an environment favorable to home-life, with special emphasis on the needs of children, has a good start toward decency, shared responsibilities and good government. Thus, by a process of natural selection, good citizens were added year by year to the original nucleus. Like attracted like, and good citizenship, already in the making, became firmly implanted.

Further analyzing the reasons for Winnetka's progress in developing its own good society, considerable credit must go to a group of able and far-sighted individuals who, in advance of its major growth and since, established its patterns of government, charted its course, and initiated its major forms and institutions. It was they who sponsored the establishment of the local utilities as municipal projects at a time when such an undertaking was a somewhat untried experiment. It was they who, before city planning

became accepted procedure, created a Winnetka Plan Commission and shortly afterward engaged the services of an eminent consultant to develop a comprehensive Village Plan, which has been the guide for all subsequent major public improvements—most of which have since been realized. It was they who advocated the employment of a Village Manager, again before that became widely accepted practice. It was they who, with the coming of zoning, quickly saw its advantages and were instrumental in its early adoption by the Village, thus perpetuating the community's residential character and stabilizing its property values. It was they who conceived, and brought into being, Community House with its wholesome and unifying influence in the life of the Village. It was they who steered away from the divisive consequences of denominational competition in the Community's church life and developed instead the few strong institutions which now occupy the field. It was they who paved the way for the installation of the then "new-fangled" progressive school system. It was they who developed the unique "caucus" system of nominating candidates for public office which has contributed so importantly to the uninterrupted good government which the Village has since enjoyed.

Thus Winnetka's progress has been evolutionary. All of its characteristics were not acquired at one time, nor were they inspired by the same individuals. The "they" to whom reference is made above were not the same individuals but have changed with the years. Many of the original group have died or moved away, but always, because of the contributions of those who have gone before, new men and women have replaced them, each seeking to enrich the heritage passed on to them.

Several other factors contributed to this evolution. Much credit, for instance, must be given to the capable administrative staff continuously headed during the past twenty-six years by our able Village Manager. The Council-Manager Plan in itself has contributed importantly to the good government enjoyed in the Village. With major responsibility for the actual running of the Village placed in the hands of a trained and qualified administrator, leaving only the legislative and policy making functions to the Council, it became possible to enlist capable and qualified citizens to serve without compensation on that body.

Certainly the cohesive and somewhat uniform quality of citizenship resulting from the process of natural selection previously mentioned has had its part in

Winnetka's sustained interest in civic affairs. But the homogeneity of the community is attributable to other factors as well. To those already mentioned must be added another, seemingly indigenous to Winnetka, namely, its community-wide Neighborhood Circles started 30 years ago and still active and flourishing. Although directed from the Community Church, they are in no sense denominational. There are 20 such Circles in the Village, one extending into each section. Membership is open to all women in the Village and includes all creeds and classes. Meetings are held once a month and may be merely in the nature of a social gathering, or may have a more serious purpose such as sewing for charity.

To promote further the consciousness of individual responsibility for the community's welfare, each new family head receives a letter from the Village President shortly after application is made for water and electric service. In this communication, he is welcomed, advised briefly of the ideals of the Village and urged to participate in its life and responsibilities. Along with the letter is enclosed the latest annual report of the Village which sets forth additional information about the background and current affairs of the Village. In the fall, the whole family, along with

all other newcomers, is invited by the Community Council to Community House, to get better acquainted among themselves and with the life of the community. At this "Winnetka-on-Parade", all group activities are represented and seek to acquaint new residents with their character and objectives. Sooner or later, and more probably sooner, the newcomer will be asked to promote, or at least share in, some of these community activities. To the customary list are now added the host of war-time activities—and all with the intensity that goes with a community never satisfied to do an average job but priding itself always on doing more than its share. Thus the effort is made to draw everybody—old and new—into the life of the community, to share its responsibilities and to perpetuate its ideals.

ONE OF OUR IMPORTANT SAFEGUARDS

Even where the tradition of good citizenship is well grounded and the sense of individual responsibility highly developed, a dependable mechanism for expressing the community's will for good government must be available. In Winnetka this has been achieved over the past 29 years through its unique "Caucus" system for nominating candidates for local office. The basic plank of the Caucus, and the one chiefly responsible for its continued success, is that "the office seeks the man, never the man the office." Thus nomi-

nation for office carries with it a degree of public recognition which is quite at variance with the stigma that sometimes attaches to self-initiated political aspirations. Through the Caucus the community is enabled to draft virtually whomever it chooses for public office. Moreover, since nomination is, or at least always has been, the equivalent of election, the necessity for an election campaign by the candidate is eliminated, serving as a further inducement for attracting qualified men and women to stand for election.

The Caucus Committee, the main spring of the Caucus system, is chosen annually. Each new Committee is initiated by the out-going Committee through the designation of a Caucus Nominating Committee of 12 members chosen from outside its membership, thus eliminating any tendency toward self-perpetuation. The members of the Nominating Committee are selected to give representation to each precinct in the Village and may not name any of their own number to the Caucus Committee.

The Nominating Committee, after careful deliberation, designates its nominees reporting directly to the Caucus meeting rather than to the Caucus Committee. Two members, sometimes three, are chosen from each

of the 12 precincts in the Village and 5 are chosen as representatives-at-large. A few members of the expiring Caucus Committee may be selected to assure familiarity with procedure but the large majority are entirely new. They are chosen for their demonstrated interest in community affairs and their known sympathy with the established procedures, traditions and ideals of the Village. If and when accepted at the general caucus meeting held in advance of the election in April, they then become the Caucus Committee for the ensuing year.

The Caucus Committee, thus chosen, meets in the fall of the year, elects its chairman, secretary and treasurer and proceeds to organize into various subcommittees — Publicity, Finance, Platform, Candidates, etc., so as effectively to discharge its duties. The principal task is, of course, the selection of suitable candidates for the offices to be filled at the spring election. Originally these consisted only of the Village and Library officials but the results there were so satisfactory that, at the request of voters, selection of the candidates for the School and Park Boards were later added. Suggestions both as to platform and candidates are invited from all organizations in the Village and from individual citizens as well. Pos-

sible candidates are checked from all angles but fitness is the one final determinant for selection. Partisan politics does not enter into the picture at all.

After protracted deliberation, the Caucus Committee makes its decisions. It then obtains the consents to serve of the candidates chosen, also their signed agreements to conform to the platform declarations, after which the nominees are announced and a public caucus meeting for their ratification or rejection is called. The general Caucus takes much the form of the old New England town meeting. Out-going officials report on their trusteeship and discussion is invited. The Caucus Committee then offers its platform for approval, reports on its finances and finally presents its nominees for office. Opportunity is allowed for the presentation of alternative nominations, though rarely have any been offered. If and when the Caucus Committee's nominees are approved by the general caucus group, they then become the official candidates of the Caucus Party and, in the absence of successful competition, are elected at the annual election in April. That the Caucus candidates have been consistently elected is evidence of its painstaking choice of nominees and reflects the community's approval of this method of choosing its public servants.

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

In a world characterized by drastic and far-reaching changes, Winnetka cannot hope to remain immune, nor does it want to do so. No thoughtful citizen would maintain that the community has solved all of its problems. Moreover, the willingness to change, to experiment, to accept new ideas has been chiefly responsible for development into the kind of a community it is. The principal effort in the future, as in the past, must be to attract and develop good citizens,

realizing that in their hands the problems of the moment will be wisely solved.

Through our schools and our churches, and, most importantly, in our homes, our young people must be brought to an understanding of the privileges we enjoy and their part in safeguarding these assets for the future. Our adult population must never be allowed to tire of its responsibilities and especially must our newcomers be brought to an understanding of the community's ideals and traditions and their part in maintaining them.

More is at stake in good local government than the individual community's own welfare. If we cannot create a good society in smaller units there is little hope that we can do so in larger ones. If we can do neither, there are always those waiting to take over the responsibility in their own way, which quite obviously will not be in the Winnetka way. If, on the other hand, we can demonstrate our capacity for self-government at the local level, we need have little fear that we shall lose it higher up.

On the north wall of the Council Chamber in the Village Hall appears the oath taken by the youth of the ancient city of Athens as they assumed the responsibilities of citizenship. This oath, reproduced

on a following page, effectively expresses the spirit of loyalty and faithfulness which alone will serve to perpetuate the heritage our community enjoys after 75 years of corporate existence. Its wording may well serve as our guide for the future—just as its substance assuredly animated those who pioneered the way.

IMPORTANT DATES

IN WINNETKA'S MUNICIPAL HISTORY

1836 First Government Survey of Area.

1837 First White Settlers.

1850 New Trier Township Organized.

1853 Original Winnetka Subdivision.

1854 Northwestern Railroad Built Through Winnetka.

1859 First School District Organized.

1869 Village Charter Granted.

1869 Land Donated for Village Common.

1870 Plat of Village Recorded.

1870 Academy Hall Erected (Now the Fire Station).

1872 First Sewer Constructed.

1884 Public Library Organized.

1886 First Concrete Sidewalk Constructed.

1893 Waterworks Installed.

1895 First Macadam Pavements.

1899 Electric Railroad Built.

1899 New Trier High School Established.

1899 Old Horace Mann School Opened (Since demolished).

1900 Municipal Electric Plant Built.

1900 Local Telephone Service Introduced.

1904 Winnetka Park District Organized.

1908 Franchise Granted to Gas Company

1910 First Section of Present Library Built.

1911 Community House Established.

1913 First Section of Winnetka Playfield Acquired.

1915 Village Caucus Plan Established.

1915 Council-Manager Plan Adopted.

1915 First Separate Storm Sewers Built.

1917 First Plan Commission Appointed.

1918 Public Schools Adopted Progressive Methods.

1920 Skokie School (Junior High) Built by Popular Subscription.

1921 Report of Plan Commission on Winnetka Plan.

1922 Zoning Ordinance Adopted.

1922 Water Filtration Plant Built.

1925 Present Village Hall Built.

1925 Old Village Hall Remodeled as a Fire Station.

1925 Municipal Service Yard Built.

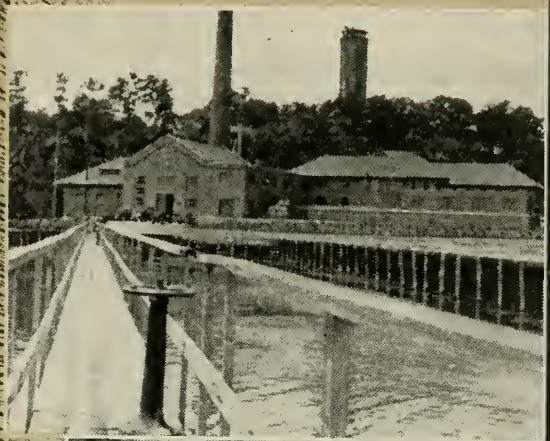
1927 Full-time Health Officer Employed.

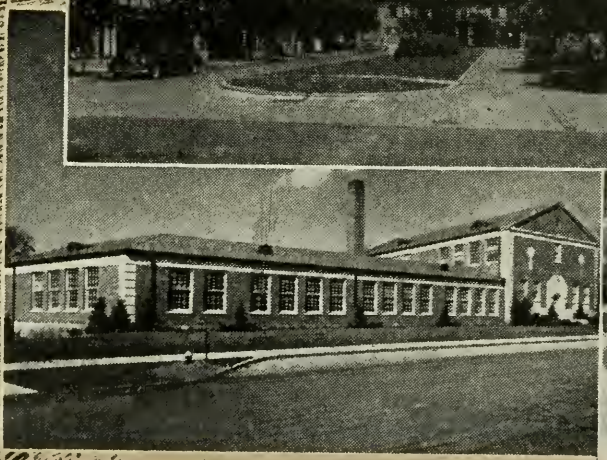
1935 Official Village Plan Adopted.

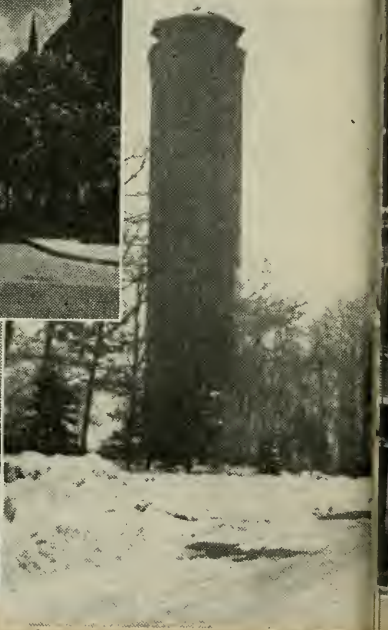
1937 Municipal Electric Plant Enlarged to Present Capacity.

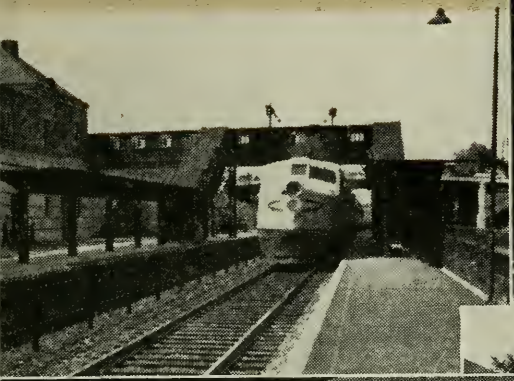
1938 Grade Separation Project Started (Completed 1941-42).

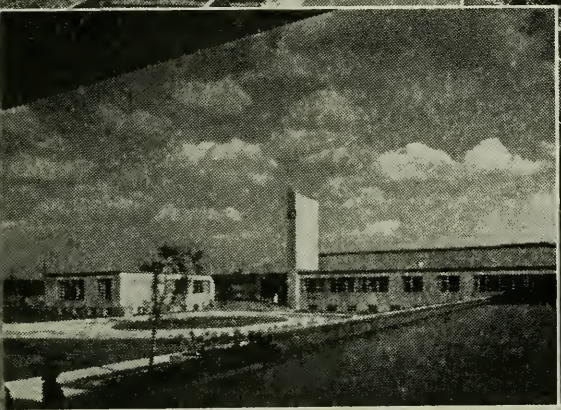
1940 Crow Island School Built.

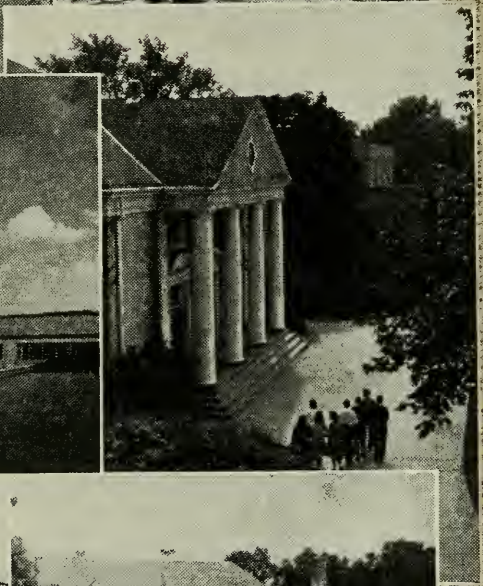


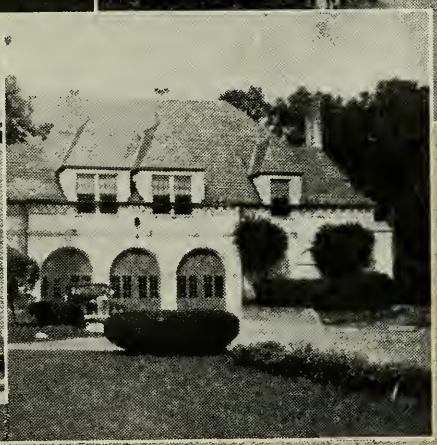












THE ATHENIAN OATH

WE WILL NEVER BRING DISGRACE TO THIS OUR CITY, BY ANY ACT OF DISHONESTY OR COWARDICE, NOR EVER DESERT OUR SUFFERING COMRADES IN THE RANKS; WE WILL FIGHT FOR THE IDEALS AND SACRED THINGS OF THE CITY, BOTH ALONE AND WITH MANY; WE WILL REVERE AND OBEY THE CITY'S LAWS AND DO OUR BEST TO INCITE A LIKE RESPECT IN THOSE ABOVE US WHO ARE PRONE TO ANNUL OR SET THEM AT NAUGHT; WE WILL STRIVE UNCEASINGLY TO QUICKEN THE PUBLIC'S SENSE OF CIVIC DUTY. THUS IN ALL THESE WAYS WE WILL TRANSMIT THIS CITY NOT ONLY NOT LESS, BUT GREATER, AND MORE BEAUTIFUL THAN IT WAS TRANSMITTED TO US.

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